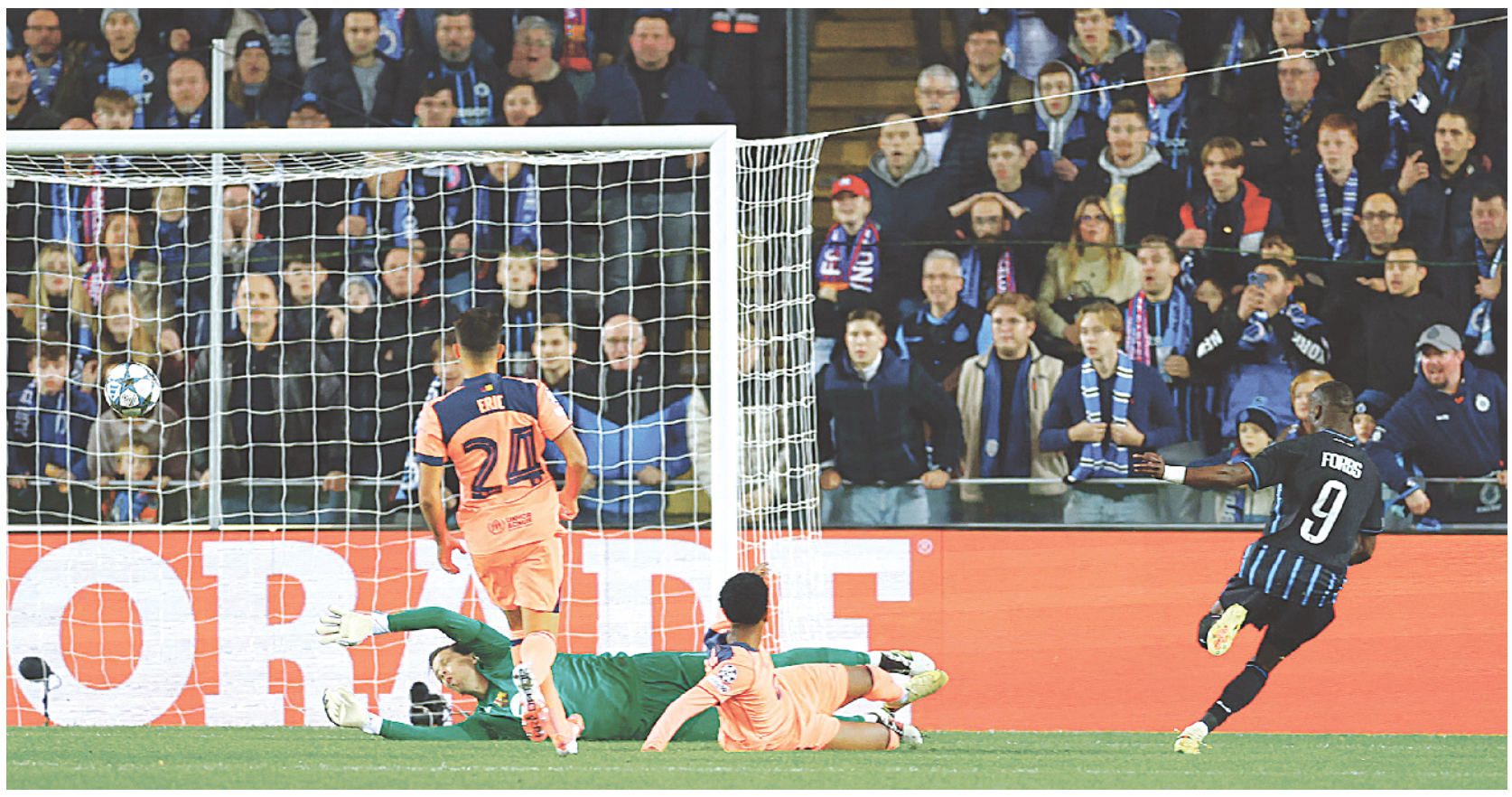
SPORT



BRUGES: Club Brugge's Carlos Forbs (R) scores past Barcelona goalkeeper Wojciech Sczecny during their Champions League match at the Jan Breydel Stadium.—Reuters

City win as Inter stay perfect, Barca held in Champions League

PARIS: Manchester City eased to a 4-1 win over Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday to stay unbeaten in the Champions League and Inter Milan kept up their perfect start, while Barcelona salvaged a point at Club Brugge.

Phil Foden twice curled in from outside the area and Erling Haaland slammed home his fifth goal of the competition as City brushed Dortmund aside at the Etihad.

Waldemar Anton pulled one back for Dortmund before Rayan Cherki netted City's fourth in stoppage time.

Pep Guardiola's side have 10 points from four matches and sit fourth in the table at the halfway stage of the league phase.

"We are in a good position, maybe with a win against Bayer Leverkusen and a few more we can be in the position to finish in the first eight," Guardiola told TNT Sports, as he lauded Foden's sparkling display.

"I would say he is already there [back to his best form]. He does not need to get closer. He is already there. It is true we have missed goals and he got two incredible goals," said Guardiola.

Guardiola also backed the midfielder, who has not played for England since March, for a return to Thomas Tuchel's squad.

"Thomas is so smart and wise, and knows exactly what national team needs," he said. "Thomas knows perfectly well how good Phil is. [But] the national team is different, it is a short time, create a team when you are not a team, because you are not there all together every day.

"But come on, Phil — there's no person in this country and all around the world who doesn't know his quality and ability.

"But England is so lucky to have many good players. That's why Phil has to push himself to be better, because when he is called, he can say 'Okay, I'm going to show how good I am'." Asked if Foden was on his way back to top form, Guardiola said: "He is already there."

Meanwhile, Inter moved back alongside Bayern Munich and Arsenal at the top with a fourth straight win after scraping past Kazakh outsiders Kairat Almaty.

Ofri Arad cancelled out Lautaro Martinez's opener nine minutes after half-time but a thumping low drive from Carlos Augusto snatched Inter a 2-1 victory, bolstering their hopes of qualifying directly for the last 16.

In Belgium, Barcelona came from behind three times to rescue a 3-3 draw as Lamine Yamal helped them overcome a shaky defensive performance.

Barca's defence was shredded on multiple occasions by the hosts as Brugge winger Carlos Forbs struck twice and set one up for Nicolo Tresoldi.

Ferran Torres, Yamal and a Christos Tzolis own goal saved Barca from what would have been a humiliating defeat, even though they have several players out injured.

There was more drama at the end as Brugge thought they had scored the winner in added time through Romeo Vermant, thanks to what looked to have been a massive blunder by Wojciech Szczesny.

But the VAR video review ruled out the goal as the forward fouled the keeper in his effort to recover the ball, helping Barca rescue a point.

Despite the inconsistent results, Barca coach Hansi Flick said his team would not abandon their approach, even though opponents have worked out how to get in behind Barca's back-line with alarming regularity.

"We can [play a] low block and defend in the final third, or we go on our way, our philosophy, how we want to do it, and make things much better," said Flick on Wednesday.

"We have struggled a little bit, we don't have the confidence. Of course we can speak about changing everything, but I am not a coach to change this, because we want to play like our DNA is. We don't want to defend in a low block and then make some transition to win 1-0."

AMSTERDAM: Galatasaray's Victor Osimhen shoots to score from the penalty spot during the match against Ajax at the Johan Cruyff Arena.—AFP

CHELSEA TOIL AS NEWCASTLE TRIUMPH

Earlier on Wednesday, Alejandro Garnacho spared Chelsea's blushes as the Argentine's equaliser rescued a 2-2 draw against Qarabag.

Enzo Maresca's side were in danger of an embarrassing loss in Baku after falling behind in the first half.

Estevao Willian gave Chelsea an early lead but Leandro Andrade equalised before Marko Jankovic converted a penalty to give the Azerbaijani minnows hope of a famous upset.

Former Manchester United winger Garnacho came off the bench to bail out the Blues with his composed finish after the interval.

"I think the big difference was inside the box," said Chelsea boss Enzo Maresca.

"Again we conceded silly goals that we could avoid and we could probably finish better with most of the actions that we created."

At St James Park, Dan Burn's superb header set Newcastle United on their way to a 2-0 home win over Athletic Bilbao.

Joelinton added a second shortly after half-time as the Magpies won for the third time in four European outings to move up to sixth place.

"Really pleased with today," Newcastle manager Eddie Howe told TNT Sports.

"We had a quick turnaround for this game. I don't think it was us at our best but we're in a good position now in this competition."

HISTORIC PAFOS WIN

In the other early game, newcomer Pafos earned its first-ever league-phase win by beating Spanish club Villarreal 1-0 at home in Cyprus.

"This was a historic win for the club and for Pafos," defender David Goldar said. "Every year we grow and we are improving and long may that continue. We've created something special here but we also need to stay humble."

In its previous matches, Pafos lost 5-1 to Bayern at home and drew 0-0 at both Kairat and Olympiakos.

Villarreal, back in the Champions League for the first time since reaching the semifinals in 2022, remains winless after four matches. It was coming off three consecutive victories in matches in the Spanish league and Copa del Rey.

OSIMHEN ON TOP

Ajax are also still without a point after Victor Osimhen bagged a hat-trick to power Galatasaray to a 3-0 victory in Amsterdam.

With the treble, Osimhen has moved atop the Champions League scoring table.

The Nigeria striker now has six goals this season in Europe's elite club competition. That's one more than Harry Kane, Kylian Mbappe and Haaland.

Following the poor form the Dutch giants Ajax sacked their John Heitinga on Thursday. Ajax has one win in its last seven matches across all tournament.

Elsewhere, Jose Mourinho's Benfica slumped to a fourth defeat in a row as Patrik Schick got the only goal in a 1-0 win for Bayer Leverkusen in Lisbon.

At the Velodrome, Lazar Samardzic hit a 90th-minute winner as Atalanta downed Olympique de Marseille 1-0 despite missing an early penalty.—Agencies

Musetti downs Wawrinka to keep ATP Finals bid alive

ATHENS: Lorenzo Musetti defeated Stan Wawrinka in three sets on Wednesday to reach the quarter-finals in Athens and keep alive his hopes of making the ATP Finals.

The Italian won his last 16 clash with the Swiss veteran 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 to earn the second seed a last eight match-up with Alexandre Muller.

Musetti needs a run to the final in Greece to deprive Felix Auger-Aliassime of the last ticket to Turin.

The Canadian moved into the eighth and final spot for the end-of-season event starting Sunday as a losing finalist at last week's Paris Masters.

"I think everybody knows what's next in my mind, it's not easy to play with that in my mind," said Musetti.

"But of course, if I want to qualify for [Turin], I have to lift the trophy here," added the 23-year-old.

Athens top seed Novak Djokovic returned after three weeks out of action to ease past Alejandro Tabilo in straight sets on Tuesday and progress to the quarters.—AFP

Faisalabad seal win over Lahore Whites in Quaid Trophy

LAHORE: Khurram Shahzad, Afaq Afridi and Asad Raza shared all 20 wickets as Faisalabad wrapped up a comprehensive victory over Lahore Region Whites on the second day of their Quaid-i-Azam Trophy sixth-round fixture at the Diamond Cricket Ground on Thursday.

Resuming at their overnight score of 69 for five, Faisalabad were dismissed for 115 in 39.5 overs, with Aamer Jamal and Nisar Ahmad sharing eight wickets between them.

Lahore, in reply, were bundled out for 81 in 20.5 overs as player-of-the-match Khurram returned impressive figures of five for 40, while Asad claimed three for 14.

Set 146 for victory, Faisalabad reached the target in 26.1 overs for the loss of six wickets. Faham-ul-Haq played a vital hand with a 42-run knock.

At the Marghzar Cricket Ground, Karachi Blues were bowled out for 391 in 107 overs after resuming on 323 for seven. Saud Shakeel missed his 23rd first-class century by seven runs, while Mohammad Amir Khan returned figures of four for 87.

Peshawar, in reply, were dismissed for 165 in 50.3 overs with Israrullah top-scoring with 62. Mohammad Umar was the pick of the bowlers, taking six wickets for 30. Karachi were 24 without loss at stumps.

At the Shoaib Akhtar Cricket Stadium, Fata piled up 687 for seven declared after resuming at 460 for three. Khushdil Shah, who completed his fourth first-class century on the opening day, went on to notch his maiden double-century, scoring 206 off 257 balls with 24 fours and three sixes.

Kamran Ghulam bagged three for 43 for Abbottabad, who closed the day at 113 for four in 34 overs. Shahzaib Khan was unbeaten on 45, including six boundaries, while Asif Afridi claimed three for 29 in 12 overs for Fata.

At the Abbottabad Cricket Stadium, Bahawalpur built on their overnight total of 203 for two to post 511 for nine, courtesy of a massive 227-run third-wicket partnership between Mohammad Ammar (166 off 310 balls, 21 fours, two sixes) and Saad Khan (155 off 169, 24 fours, one six).

For Sialkot, Hasan Ali took three for 77 in 26 overs, while skipper Usama Mir and pacer Mohammad Ali picked up two wickets apiece.

Sialkot were 41 without loss in seven overs at stumps, with Azan Awais (20 not out) and Mohammad Huraira (18 not out) at the crease.

At the Imran Khan Cricket Stadium in Peshawar, Islamabad were bowled out for 333 after resuming on 272 for eight. Hunain Shah, batting at No.10, made a brisk 60-ball 51 with five fours and two sixes.

For Multan, Mohammad Ismail and Ali Usman shared eight wickets for 177 runs.

In reply, Multan folded for 170 in 44.3 overs, with skipper Imam-ul-Haq top-scoring with 51. Naqeebullah and Hunain bagged three wickets apiece. Following on, Multan were 19 without loss at stumps.—Agencies

Sajjad exits worlds after defeat in last-16

DOHA: Pakistan's Mohammad Sajjad saw his campaign at the IBSF World Snooker Championship come to a close after a 4-2 defeat to America's Andy McCloskey in the last 16 of the second event on Thursday.

The national championship runner-up, who entered the secondary tournament after his loss in the main event's round-of-16, started the day strongly.

He dispatched the UAE's Abdulla Alattar in a dominant 4-0 victory in the round-of-32.

However, his momentum was halted by a resilient McCloskey in the following round.

The American took a back-and-forth encounter, claiming the first frame 71-41 before Sajjad responded with a strong 80-1 win to level.

McCloskey reclaimed the lead by taking a low-scoring third frame 45-11 and then extended his advantage with a 71-11 victory in the fourth, fuelled by a break of 65.

Facing elimination, Sajjad fought back to take the fifth frame 79-40, but McCloskey sealed the match and a place in the quarter-finals by winning the sixth frame 73-35.—Agencies

Pakistan trio make ITF Jr semis

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's trio of Abubakr Talha, Mikaeel Ali Baig and Hamza Roman reached the boys' singles semi-finals of the ITF Pakistan World Junior Tennis Championship J-60 here at the SDA-PTF Complex on Thursday.

Abubakr beat Japan's Ippei Matsushima 6-3, 6-7(3), 6-1, Mikaeel outplayed Kristijonas Milasauskas of Lithuania 6-1, 6-4 while Hamza outgunned Czech Republic's Nicolas Moravec 6-2, 6-4 in the quarter-finals.

Results (quarter-finals):

Boys' singles: Emre Atlamis (Turkey) bt Mohammad Hassan Usmani (Pakistan) 6-4, 0-6, 6-1; Abubakr Talha (Pakistan) bt Ippie Matsushima (Japan) 6-3, 6-7(3), 6-1; Mikaeel Ali Baig (Pakistan) bt Kristijonas Milasauskas (Lithuania) 6-1, 6-4; Hamza Roman (Pakistan) bt Nicolas Moravec (Czech Republic) 6-2, 6-4

Girls' singles: Haniya Aman Minhas (Saudi Arabia) bt Yewon Lee (Korea) 6-2, 6-2; Varvara Rubtsova (Russia) bt Ecrin lal Yavuz (Turkey) 5-7, 7-6(3), 6-2; Deniz Cakil (Turkey) bt Polina Barabanova (Kazakhstan) 1-6, 7-6(5), 6-4; Karolina Ligai (Kazakhstan) bt Serifie Pelin Sari (Turkey) 6-0, 6-0

Boys' doubles: Mikaeel Ali Baig (Pakistan)/ Kristijonas Milasauskas (Lithuania) bt Shehryar Anees (Pakistan)/Asad Zaman (Pakistan) 6-1, 6-1; Emre Atlamis (Turkey)/Nicolas Moravec (Czech Republic) bt Chanapat (Thailand)/Jun Woo (Korea) 6-2, 6-1; Hamza Roman/Abubakr Talha (Pakistan) bt Amir Mazari/Zohaib Afzal Malik (Pakistan) 6-4, 6-3; Abdul Basit/ Mohammad Haziq Aasim (Pakistan) bt Ahtesham Humayun (Pakistan)/Ippei Matsushima (Japan) 6-4, 2-6(10-8).—Sports Reporter

Sabalenka overcomes holder Gauff to reach semis of WTA Finals

JESSICA Pegula of the US eyes a return during the WTA Finals match against Italy's Jasmine Paolini at the King Saud University Indoor Arena on Thursday.—Reuters

RIYADH: Aryna Sabalenka roared back from a slow start to beat Coco Gauff 7-6(5), 6-2 and clinch a semi-final spot at the season-ending WTA Finals on Thursday, sending the defending champion packing and assuring Jessica Pegula of a place in the last four.

The world number one, who is seeking a maiden trophy in the event since a run to the final three years ago, finished top of the Steffi Graf Group and next takes on Amanda Anisimova in a rematch of their US Open title clash.

American Pegula takes on in-form Kazakh Elena Rybakina, who qualified for the last four as the best player from the Serena Williams Group.

Gauff's erratic serve had been a concern after her opening defeat by Pegula, but it was the 21-year-old's aggressive return game that stood out against Sabalenka as she broke to start the match and went 4-2 up at the King Saud University Sports Arena.

Sabalenka let out a scream after she saved break points and held for 3-4 in the rematch of the French Open title clash that she lost, and the fired-up Belarusian soon broke to draw level at 5-5 with a neat forehand winner.

Sabalenka showed more fight in the tiebreak to come from behind and take the first set, and there was no stopping the 27-year-old when she eased to a 4-0 lead in the second set.

Earlier, Pegula secured a breezy 6-2, 6-3 victory over the already-eliminated Jasmine Paolini and said she would work out a strategy for her next opponent despite knowing there was a slim chance of an exit if Gauff prevailed in three sets.

"We're going to be really happy with today, for the rest of the day and maybe for most of the night, and then we're going to have to switch strategies a little bit because it's a quick turnaround now," said Pegula. "We'll be ready for the next opponent."

Pegula gained the upper hand, winning five out of the first six games after Paolini faltered on her serve early, before the 2023 runner-up took the first set, giving her Italian opponent no chance.

Paolini withstood some powerful baseline hitting in the next set to hold in the opening game but Pegula continued to heap on the pressure and broke for the third time in the contest, paving the way for a comprehensive victory.

"Today I finally got a straight-sets win for the first time in like a few months," Pegula said. "That always feels really good. I thought I served well, just played solid and was aggressive when I needed to be. There weren't any negative notes today."

On Wednesday, Anisimova pulled off a stellar comeback to get the better of Iga Swiatek 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 6-2 and book her spot in the last four.

Making her tournament debut this week, the fourth-seeded Anisimova secured the runner-up spot in the Serena Williams Group. Anisimova improved her three-set record this season to an impressive 15-3 by posting her 10th top-10 win of the year.—Agencies